

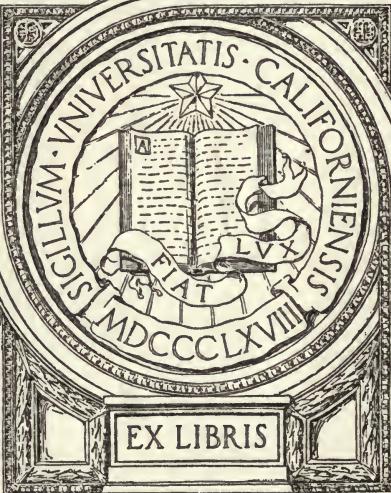
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## PROPERTIUS: A MODERN LOVER IN THE AUGUSTAN AGE

It seems to be the popular impression that in this universe of growth and change the one thing always new and yet eternally the same is love. Ages have gone by, but the love of Hector and Andromache is still the love that makes the world go round; empires have fallen, but the divorce courts are still as busy as they were in the days of Cæsar Augustus. But love is not always the same. Shall we believe that the legions serving under Cupid make no progress, that they never annex new provinces, that, like the Bourbons, they learn nothing and forget nothing? It was said by the ancient Greeks—and I know of no higher authority—that Love is the oldest of the gods. If so, we may assume, as did the Greeks, that he has developed with age—or rather, with the ages; for the gods are always young. Of course, evolution is not necessarily improvement. The hero of a psychological novel is generally more interesting in a book than in a household. And certainly this person is not Homeric: rather is he in himself an epitome of the greater complexity, the more pronounced self-consciousness of modern life. Here, however, as elsewhere, the rule holds good that that which is characteristic of a given period of evolution is not necessarily confined to it. On the contrary, the type is usually heralded far in advance by an occasional sport. Just such a sport is to be found in that great repository of antique sentiment, that day-book of Cupid's doings nineteen centuries ago, the Roman Elegy of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid.

Tradition demanded that in this product and reflection of an age of intellectual refinement and cultivated leisure the personal note should be dominant. The elegiac poet is, therefore, expected to be—

“as true a lover,”  
As ever sigh'd upon a midnight pillow,”

and his verses are supposed to chronicle his parlous state. But these idle singers of an empty day are not expected to be intense. The conventional love affair of the Elegy follows simple

lines. In fact, the beaten paths of modern as well as of antique sentiment do not mount to the lonely peaks of contemplation and the wider outlooks of the spirit.

Tibullus and Ovid, each in his own way, are standard representatives of this attitude. Not so Propertius. He has none of the reserve of Tibullus, and very little of the humorous objectivity of Ovid. In an atmosphere of half-ironical sentiment and cultivated persiflage, he is for the most part passionately serious and desperately sincere. As a poet he is a proverb of abruptness, irregularity, startling contrasts, and obscurity. He did not,—nay, he could not,—think as others have thought. His emotional insight, his bizarre and powerful imagination, strain at the leash of the distich and tax every resource of his native tongue. And the lover, like the poet, is a bundle of apparent paradoxes and inconsistencies. He was never old in years; yet, matured early as he was in the fierce sun of an absorbing passion, he was never really young in spirit. Hence, as Frédéric Plessis says, his poetry has a touch of harshness, the suspicion, as it were, of a bitter after-taste, reminding one of fruit that has ripened without sunlight, of hearts that have loved without happiness. His keen analytical mind and irresolute will, the purity of his home-training and the essential depravity of contemporary love in idleness, the serious strain of his Umbrian sires and the vagaries of his artistic temperament, are never reconciled, never at peace, within him. His soul is instinct with high ideals, his mind can give them definite shape; but his feelings, like some delicately tuned *Æolian* harp, are swayed by impulses and responsive to passing breezes of emotion unfelt and unheard by the average man. In his life, as in his poetry, he lacks self-control. He is restless, self-conscious, emotional, almost neurotic. He is analytical and introspective, he explores the highways and byways of his affair; indeed, his emotional insight sometimes guides him into what at that time were the untrodden wilds of Cupid's domain. Like all such men, he is at times frankly, even ostentatiously, brutal. Nevertheless, his passion is complicated with ideals and aspirations, with mental and spiritual motives, unguessed or disregarded by his fellow-sufferers. In brief, Propertius is an amatory sport, a modern

lover born into the world more than sixty generations before his time.

The poet was a native of Assisi, and the last scion of a long line of Umbrian mountaineers. He tells us expressly that they had never attained any high official distinction in Rome. It is clear, however, that he was a Roman Knight and that his people were of considerable importance in their own neighborhood.

His boyhood was filled with disaster. In earliest infancy he lost his father. Only a little later the large family property was swept away by the well-known confiscation of lands after Philippi for the veterans of Octavianus. Fortunately, enough was either saved, or at some later time recovered, to insure the poet and his mother a comfortable income. Meanwhile, however, the measure of Octavianus was deeply resented by the Umbrian countryside—to this day the best fighting blood in Italy—and the conflict that ensued was one of the most sanguinary episodes of the Civil Wars. Only twelve miles from home was Perugia, in those days an almost impregnable stronghold. The rebels, among the rest one Gallus, the boy's maternal uncle, took refuge there; and the siege which followed was perhaps the most horrible of all the many sieges endured by that famous old city. It was finally taken and sacked in the year 40. During the uproar Gallus managed to get by the lines of Octavianus, but on the way home was set upon by freebooters and left for dead. The news was brought to the family by a wounded soldier who had found Gallus in a dying condition, and had promised to convey his last farewell to his sister. The two fragmentary elegies at the close of the poet's first book, written years afterward, show how deeply his childish mind had been impressed by the event. Curiously enough, the abruptness and obscurity of these pieces, their lack of transitions and gradations, exactly reproduce that unreal reality, that strange sense of remoteness, of silence, which always characterize the shifting series of pictures, vivid but disconnected and only visual, that constitute the memories of childhood.

Soon afterwards Propertius, then a boy of eight or ten, was taken to Rome by his mother; she appears to have remained with him there until her death, which occurred when he was

about twenty. The legal profession, for which she had had him educated, was for young men of his position the open door to distinction. But nature never intended Propertius for an advocate; and at fifteen or sixteen, in other words, as soon as he became of age, he turned definitely and finally to poetry. He had already written considerable verse, and doubtless he wrote a great deal more during the next two or three years. Meanwhile, too, and from the first, he must have been an ardent and omnivorous reader of the Alexandrian literature.

Of this period of studious home-life, varied no doubt by a certain amount of social distraction, no definite record remains. It was only preparatory, and was soon invaded by the woman whom he calls Cynthia. The ensuing love affair inspired so large a proportion of his surviving poetry that henceforth the story of Cynthia and the story of Propertius are one. They cannot be separated.

Of course we have no right to expect a definite and detailed narrative. A series of elegies so constructed would be at variance with an artistic canon of the type as evident as it is important. Moreover, a poet, even when he assumes the attitude of a biographer, is not obliged to be one. "Ods life," says Prior to his Chloe, "must one tell the truth in a song!" He has a perfect right to combine fact and fiction, actual events and merely literary motives.

In a general way, Propertius is no exception to this rule. What he gives us is for the most part "a mere alternation," as Sellar observes, "of passionate moods." These, however, indicate the general trend of events. He is also full of literary allusions. But this, too, is no proof of unreality. A man thinks he has been in the habit of thinking. An acquired style may, and often does, become a second nature. Indeed, at the greatest crisis of their lives men have been known to resort to a mere quotation, even to a quotation in a foreign tongue, *Ἄνεππιφθω κύβος*, 'the die is cast,' as it is (incorrectly) translated, were Caesar's words at the Rubicon. The phrase, says Plutarch, is a quotation from Menander. Now and then, too, Propertius works out a theme which already has a long literary tradition. Even here we must not forget that the main situations in every love affair are

few, and that they are repeated in every generation. But perhaps the essential verity of the poet's story is best shown by the fact that the psychology of it is at once too consistent in itself and too much at variance with literary conventionalities to be the invention of any poet in the Augustan Age. In fact, I doubt whether it could be accounted for by literary motives alone in any age.

Thanks to her own dominant personality and the skill of the artist by whom she is painted, Cynthia is the most real and the most interesting of the elegiac heroines. She is an individual, and there is no one like her in antique poetry.

Her social position, or better, perhaps, her position before the law, cannot be determined with certainty. As a rule the heroine of the Elegy is a *hetaira*, and in Rome this class was largely represented by the *libertinae*, or freedwomen. We learn, however, from Propertius that Cynthia was the granddaughter of a famous poet, and from Apuleius 150 years afterwards that her real name was Hostia. Her grandfather, then, must have been that Hostius near the beginning of the first century B.C. who wrote a poem on the Istrian War. If so, she was hardly a freedwoman, but rather a *declassée*, a type only too common in the brilliant but lax society of the Augustan period.

The minuteness with which Propertius describes her perfections is as modern as it is unclassical. In this respect the lover of Cynthia is a striking contrast to the lover of Lesbia. Both men are sensitive, sensuous, luxurious. Both men reacted keenly and instantly to the beautiful. But Propertius was analytical and reflective. He could not attain the joyous wisdom of Catullus's immortal youth. Propertius never could have destroyed the tally of his raptures—"Conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus," as Catullus said of his Lesbia's kisses. On the contrary, he must needs count, weigh, and appraise them one by one.

Her eyes were large, dark and brilliantly expressive:—

"Twin torches they to set my heart on fire,  
Twin stars to guide me through life's trackless sea."

Her hair was *fulvus*, presumably the tawny red of Titian. At all events, her complexion is 'white lilies,' 'the first flush of Dawn,' 'rose-leaves floating in milk'; apparently what he means is

the delicate skin, the delicate pink and white suggestive of sweet-peas, which not infrequently goes with such hair. Once, to be sure, he does accuse her of paint—this in connection with the importation of a yellow wig from Britain—but only to bring home the fact that she is ravishingly beautiful as she is. Her hands were slim and delicate, her fingers long and shapely. Even when she is trying to scratch out his eyes, he thinks of her nails as *formosæ*. Doubtless he would have said as did the lover in the old play:—

“Her lips made swearings sound of piety,  
So sweet and prettily they came from her.”

She walks like the goddesses. Once, indeed, he insists that she is more beautiful than Venus and several other Olympian ladies of quality whom he enumerates in the succeeding lines. She was *maxima toto corpore*, he says. *Maxima* is not big and bony, and not ample, *spatiosa*, as Ovid says expressively of Andromache—Cynthia was too sensitive and high-strung for that—but rather stately and impressive. Tall she may have been, but I suspect she seemed taller to him than she really was—partly because of her carriage, partly because of her dominant will. To the last he stood a little in awe of her.

It is possible that what we have here was something very like the Italian type immortalized by Titian. If so, it was probably modified by more intellect and perhaps by more irregularity of feature than is usual in Titian's women. Cynthia was not alone beautiful: she was fascinating, witty, a fine conversationalist, an accomplished musician, an adept in the mysteries of the loom, a first-class literary critic. Nay she was a poetess—a poetess, too, whose verses, says Propertius, are quite the equal of Corinna's.

Sometimes, indeed, he confides to us that he cares less for her beauty than for these other attractions. In the light of his cool and analytical, yet aspiring and idealizing, mind, he is telling the truth. But alas for his weak and passionate heart! It was her beauty, not her accomplishments, that dragged him back to her again and again, even in his own despite.

“Quamvis dura, tamen rara puella fuit,”

is his own reluctant admission, even while nursing his wrongs after a mortal quarrel.

Such, if we make due allowance for the enthusiasm of a lover, was the woman whom Propertius met at the turning-point of his career. He could not have been much over eighteen: precocious and erratically brilliant, filled with his book-learning, fired with his Alexandrian poets; but scarcely more than the child he had just ceased to be.

Cynthia, on the contrary, as we might guess, was several years older—probably not less than twenty-four or twenty-five—and well-versed in the art of subjugation. Not, however, that such a woman needed any special training to subjugate this innocent and ardent, shy and passionate boy. The difficulty would be to get such a boy to declare his love. The stormy and impetuous Cynthia, however, realizing that she was dealing not with a theory but with a condition, took the matter into her own hands and made the declaration herself. Of course, he was swept off his feet.

It is easy to see why he loved Cynthia. He himself gives us a number of excellent reasons. But why did Cynthia love him? Propertius gives us two reasons—his verse and his fidelity. No doubt he had her own word for it, and he seems really to have believed it. But these were not her reasons; otherwise she would not have given them. Moreover, in affairs of the heart poetry is of no demonstrable value. His friend Ovid could have told him that. And even fidelity, though infinitely superior to the brand supplied by Propertius, is not always as important as it ought to be. I am inevitably reminded of the old man who while riding home from his wife's funeral remarked to a friend: "Well, she was a good wife; the meals were always on time, the stockings were always darned, and everything was all right: I lived with her for forty years—and I never did like her!" The words are such a revelation of our poor human nature that one hardly knows whether to laugh or cry.

We might imagine the novelty of reversed conditions, the attraction of youth and inexperience, etc.; in short, the usual stock in trade of the modern psychological novelist. But these are passing. We must look deeper to explain a feeling which,

whatever its original basis was, lasted through everything and until her dying day. Perhaps she herself never paused to inquire. Cynthia, however, after every possible deduction, was not an ordinary woman. She had a strong mind; her character, though passionate and ill-regulated, was generous, and above all, she could idealize. Her lover was young and inexperienced, but he was a poet and an idealist. In spite of her previous experience—nay, for that very reason—the first love of this home-bred boy must have been a revelation to her. He was not the type she had met, and, alas, was still to meet. May we not assume that in those days she was often touched to the quick by a delicacy and consideration to which she was not accustomed, aroused by traits and opinions new in her experience, pleased and inspired by the unquestioning attribution to herself of virtues and ideals which other men had never discovered?

Of these first hours of unclouded happiness we have no record except that the lovers met out of doors and at night. On those occasions, when they pledged eternal fidelity under the stars, when she was carried away not only by their mutual passion, but by his infectious idealism, when she sat by his side and gazed upon the bright vision of their future called up by his wonderful imagination, who knows how often even she may have dreamed of the impossible? Not until the last do we hear of those happy hours, and, what is significant of the essential truth of our deduction, it is Cynthia, not Propertius, who speaks of them.

Of course, they were both very human, and, as usual, the fact was emphasized in their later companionship. The artistic temperament is full of moods and fancies. And they both had it. Propertius was a born self-tormentor, and not an easy man to live with under any circumstances. And Cynthia herself was anything but an equable person. The barometer of her moods never stood at 'set fair.' She was undisciplined, full of extremes, a woman of fire and ice, proud, imperious, sensitive, quick to resent and slow to forgive. There were halcyon hours of capricious fondness, when he felt himself all but translated; there were whirlwinds of tempestuous rage, when he was all but in danger of his life; there were dead calms of glacial indifference, when all he could do was to shiver and wait. Between her

cruelty and her kindness, her furious abuse and her furious tenderness, he scarcely knew whether he was most happy in his misery or most miserable in his happiness.

After all, however, these variations were nothing very serious. The lovers were still extremely happy in their own stormy fashion. Propertius was urged by his friend Tullus to accompany him on an extended tour in the East. The offer was tempting, but was finally declined. Cynthia, too, was hotly pursued by a certain rich suitor to accompany him to Illyria, but she finally refused. The decision says much for the real depth of her affection, for when we consider the uncertainty of her position, as well as of her income, she sacrificed far more than did Propertius. It was one of the happiest hours of the poet's life. "I walk among the highest stars," he cries, "for Cynthia, the peerless Cynthia, is always mine!"

Perhaps the most refreshing, and certainly the most unusual, aspect of this affair is the almost complete absence of those complaints of greed and extravagance which recur with such wearisome regularity in the amatory literature of antiquity. Cynthia was not mercenary. Her lover affirms it more than once, and in so many words. She did love finery—as any woman should, and generally does. And finery is expensive. But he never criticizes her love of finery on the score of expense, much less on the score of expense to him. Adverse criticism of her attire is always for some other reason, and what is especially characteristic of Propertius, the reason put in the foreground is never the real reason.

"Why, dear heart," he ventures to expostulate in the famous elegy devoted to this theme, "do you care to go out and join the parade, your hair adorned with jewels, and to sway within the transparent folds of Coan vestments? Why to drench your locks with myrrh of the Orontes, and to put yourself on the market with endowments not your own? Why will you mar the beauty of nature with embellishments bought with a price, instead of allowing your real self to shine resplendent in its own advantages? Believe me, not anything you take for that fair form can make it more fair. Cupid himself is naked; he is no lover of the artifices of beauty. See what colors the beautiful

earth puts forth, how the ivy twines better of its own sweet will, how the arbute rears itself the more lovely in lonely glens, how the brook has skill to run on ways untaught. The strand adorned with its native pebbles has a winning charm, and the winged folk sing the sweeter that they sing untrained."

"The heroines of old"—and he pauses to name and describe several of them—"owed nothing to artifice. Their helper was beauty unadorned. They had no desire to go forth and gather up lovers from the passing crowd." "Not that I am afraid now," he says at once, beginning to hedge, "that I am cheaper in your eyes than those other men. It's only that if a girl dresses to please *one* person, she dresses enough, especially in your case." And he closes with a rapturous tribute to her beauty and accomplishments.

Now, the ostensible theme here is the old one of Nature against Art. But Propertius never wrote this elegy to discourage Cynthia's habit of gilding the lily. He had no objection to her 'Coan vestments,' her dress of chiffon silk. On the contrary, he referred to it several times again in later years. It was not *how* she dressed that troubled him; it was *why* she dressed.

Not, however, that he had any real grounds for his distrust as yet. Indeed, of the two it was she, not he, who had the better right to complain. The cruel law of all such affairs as theirs is that the new relation which had stayed and, at least for the time being, had uplifted the one, had an inevitable tendency to unbalance and demoralize the other. He accepted too many invitations to dinner parties and imbibed from the flowing bowl much oftener and more deeply than was good for him. Cynthia was hurt by his neglect, and was temperamentally prone to believe the worst.

This lamentable stage of the affair is clearly to be seen in the famous third elegy of the first book:—

As on that shore the Cretan relaxed in slumber lay  
While Theseus' traitorous galley was speeding fast away,  
Or like old Cepheus' daughter, when first she sank to sleep,  
Freed from the flinty crag, and that horror of the deep,  
Or as some fair bacchante, with furious dancing spent,  
Rests by the Thracian torrent in sweet abandonment—  
E'en such the dainty slumber my Cynthia seemed to breathe,

Her lovely head half propped by the yielding arms beneath,  
When, trailing fuddled footsteps long past the midnight hour  
And lighted by my link-boys, I staggered to her bower.  
While still some sense was left me, I tried, but vainly tried,  
Reclining very softly, to stretch out by her side.  
But though a double madness, one from the God of wine  
And one from Love—both mighty—burned in this heart of mine,  
Though each of them was urging, on that side and on this:  
“Nay, throw your arms around her and wake her with a kiss,”  
I did not dare to trouble my mistress’s repose,  
I feared her bitter chidings, I feared as one who knows!  
And so I stuck there staring, like Argus in amaze  
When first the horns of Io met his astonished gaze.  
At times, I loosed the garlands my throbbing temples bare  
And set them on your tresses to breathe their fragrance there;  
Anon, I shaped some ringlet disturbed amid your sleep  
Or stealthily fair apples I gave your hands to keep.  
But slumber still was thankless and all my gifts were vain;  
Each time your lap refused them, and down they rolled again.  
And always when you nestled exquisitely and sighed,  
Aghast at my own fancies, methought that signified  
Your dreams, perhaps, were haunted by some uncanny dread,  
Or else, an uncouth monster seemed drawing near your bed.  
At last, the Moon that sped by the casements on her way—  
The busy Moon, whose torches were fain to bid her stay—  
Smote softly Cynthia’s eyes with her airy shafts. She woke,  
And, propped upon one elbow, thus chidingly she spoke:  
“Now that she wearies of you, and you are forced to flee,  
Because her door ejects you, you turn—at last—to me!  
You said you’d come! Where were you? The long, long hours are  
gone,  
And now, at last, I see you—limp with debauch—at dawn!  
Oh heartless, faithless, Sextus, I would, indeed, that you  
Were forced to pass such nights as you make me linger through!  
At times, to cheat my slumbers, I span, or was inspired  
To turn awhile to music. But I was very tired  
And to myself, deserted, I softly made my moan:  
‘Tis often thus when lovers no longer love their own.  
And then, as I seemed falling, sweet wingèd Sleep was fain  
To waft me on to Dreamland—and I forgot my pain.”

The elegy is an excellent example of the poet’s inveterate habit of thinking in terms of literary allusions. When he sees Cynthia asleep in the moonlight, he is reminded of the sleeping Ariadne, that famous work of art of which the Ariadne of the Vatican is undoubtedly a copy. Every line of the elegy itself is instinct with suggestions of Hellenic poetry, Hellenic art, Hellenic life. Yet nothing could be more real, nothing more con-

vincingly personal, than is that same sleeping figure. In our mind, the very moonlight seems real and Latin—the summer moon as he saw it when, twenty centuries ago, it shone through the casement and gave unearthly beauty to the upturned face of Cynthia asleep.

This process of quarrelling and ‘making up’—as in the elegy just quoted—went on for two years or more. Then came an unfortunate sea-voyage, which he either had to take or chose to take. Cynthia was furious with him. However, he went—and was shipwrecked for his pains. Then when he returned, he was furious with her for not being sympathetic. “I have often expected some cruel blow from your fickleness, Cynthia,” he says (1,15,1), “but never such cruelty as this!” All of which is at once pathetic and amusing. Then he wanted to make up. His wrath never lasted as long as did hers. But this time the ice would not melt. She invited him to stay away for an indefinite period.

It was really a crushing blow to him. In about a year’s time, not far from 28 B.C., appeared the *Cynthia Monobiblos*, now the first book of his collected works. Those who know the first elegy of this series may well ask themselves whether any other man has ever introduced a volume of amatory poems in a mood of such utter despair.

The book was dedicated to Cynthia, and was either the cause or the result of a reconciliation. And the lasting fame of Propertius was at once assured. He was immediately taken up by Augustus and Mæcenas, and became one of the brilliant circle by which they were surrounded. His house on the Esquiline, of which he speaks in the third book, was probably near that of Mæcenas, and, indeed, may have been a present from him.

Doubtless the reunited lovers were very happy for a time. But his record of this period, in the second and third books, indicates here and there that his point of view towards her and towards the world at large was changing. The influence of Mæcenas, an awakening sense of responsibility, the sobering—also the hardening—effect of his own life are all visible. He can think seriously now of going to Athens for the absent treatment, he can look forward, as do Horace and Vergil, to

graver and more exalted themes. It is significant that, as compared with the first book, there is a marked increase in the number of poems not concerned with Cynthia.

But this is not all. The same story is told by the elegies addressed to Cynthia herself. When, for example, in the introduction of his second book, he pictures himself as being asked why he can write so often of love, he replies that it is because his theme and his inspiration are always Cynthia. If she goes forth arrayed in Coan vestments, the result is a whole volume all about those Coan vestments. A truant lock, her nimble fingers as she plays upon the lyre, her lovely eyes when they droop in slumber—these are a thousand themes for a poet—and as for her caresses, they are an *Iliad*. Whatever she says or does straightway becomes a long and most important classic, sprung from nothing. All this is a fresh and delightful variation on an amatory commonplace, but it is not necessarily as accurate a statement of his own feelings as it once was. The examples he gives were deliberately intended to recall the elegies of the previous book, and after all we cannot be sure that the whole poem is anything more than a graceful way of declining Mæcenas's pressing invitation to contribute to the already overstocked library of Augustan epics.

Once, upon her birthday—poor Cynthia, her birthdays were beginning to grow unwelcome—he begs her to “put on the dress she was wearing the first time he met her.” Someone has called this “a curiously feminine trait.” On the contrary, Propertius was never less feminine than here. Otherwise he would have described the dress accurately and in detail. It is true, of course, that antique fashions were less changeable than ours, yet who, pray, except one whose only recollection of a dress was the fact that the wearer was entrancingly beautiful in it—in other words, who but a man, would dream of asking any woman to show herself in a dress five years behind the style? Nevertheless, the request is pathetic. It shows that his memories, and doubtless hers too, were sweeter than present experience.

Again, he can at times examine his own symptoms with a certain amount of objective, semi-professional interest. Now and then he even betrays a sense of humor. For example, on

one occasion he is moved to observe that in this particular dis temper known as love prescriptions are worth nothing, charms have no force, magic potions are absolutely useless. Moreover, you can't see anything, there are no pathological symptoms, no acute attacks. Where all the trouble comes from is an utter mystery. The patient doesn't need a doctor, he doesn't have to take to his bed, he is not affected by any kind of weather, no particular season of the year seems to be bad for him.

*Ambulat, et subito mirantur funus amici!—*

“he walks about,—and all of a sudden his friends are amazed to see his corpse on the way to the grave!” A variation on the old theme that love is incurable, that might have come straight from the Comedy.

And yet they were lovers still, in spite of themselves, in spite of each other, and in the same tempestuous way. But we can no longer smile at their antics. The causes of them have ceased to be slight or purely imaginary. The lovers were both unfaithful. Propertius was the slave of his temperament. Cynthia had taken a characteristic revenge. And they were both very miserable. Yet it is significant of the essentially generous nature of the man that he occasionally rises to heights never attained in his happier days. There are bursts of unselfish—I had almost said, remorseful—tenderness, the depth of which has rarely been matched in antique literature. Never, too, even in the glorious hours of their first love, did he pay such homage to beauty as once in these later days when she was desperately ill, and he begged Pluto and Proserpina, with the touching naïveté of the ancient faith, not to take her from him (2, 28, 49):—

“So many thousand thousand fair women are fordone,  
And throng the Halls of Hades, can ye not spare this one?”

*Sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum :  
Pulchra sit in superis, si licet, una locis.*

One thinks of Mimnermos. The haunting melody of the lines seems in itself to echo the regret of the poet—nay, to echo the regret of the ages—for the passing of youth and beauty.

But there are also occasions when his mood is harder and more

bitter than ever before. And it was in this mood that he wrote the last elegy of the third book:—

I was a joke at dinners, ay, any would-be wit  
Might use me for a target, and I must stomach it.  
Five years I could be loyal ; but now, you'll often mourn,  
Biting your nails for anguish, the faith at last outworn.  
Nay, weeping will not touch me—I know that trick of old ;  
You always weep from ambush, I cannot be cajoled.  
I shall depart in tears, but my wrongs will check their flow :  
Ours was a team well sorted—you could not leave it so.  
So now, my mistress' threshold, where oft my tear-drops fell,  
And thou, the door I haunted, I bid ye both farewell.  
May age afflict you, Cynthia, with ill-dissembled years,  
And may you see the wrinkles your fading beauty fears.  
And when your glass flings at you the ruin pictured there,  
Go curse them, every wrinkle, and every whitening hair.  
Be you in turn excluded, and suffer proud disdain,  
And all you did to others be done to you again.  
So fate shall soon avenge me ; my page bids you give ear :  
Your beauty waits this ending. Woman, believe—and fear !

Not very chivalrous words, perhaps. But even in pieces with so long a pedigree of literary convention as this, the ancients were nearer to nature and not so afraid of the verities of life as are we.

We are now not very far from 22 B.C. The fourth and last book, as we learn from a reference in the closing elegy, must have been published after the year 15. How long after, and whether published by the author or posthumously, it is impossible to say. The fact, however, that we hear no more of Propertius suggests that he must have died not far from that date ; and the miscellaneous character of the eleven elegies of the book leads one to guess that they are merely what was left of his unpublished work.

For purposes of this inquiry our interest is confined to two elegies,—the seventh and eighth. Verse technique shows that, like the rest of the book, they were certainly written somewhat later than the last of the previous collection. In view of their character and contents it is important to keep this fact in mind.

The second of the two gives us our last glimpse of Cynthia in this life. She is the same passionate Cynthia, and in one of her fits of wild rage. The scene is one that might have come

straight from a roaring farce of the Restoration. It does not present the poet in an enviable light, and the hardening, even vulgarizing, effect of his conduct not only upon him, but also upon her, is only too evident. But the born self-tormentor for once forgets his *métier* and tells us the story with a rollicking, reckless humor that reveals an entirely new aspect of his remarkable genius. One might assert that what we have here is merely the recollection in later years of an occurrence belonging to the old days of the previous book—the cool, detached, reminiscent vein, so to speak, prompted by an affair long since dead and buried.

If so, how ~~small~~<sup>h</sup> we explain the companion piece? Here we learn, if we learn anything, that the lovers did not part at the end of the third book; on the contrary, that they were parted only by death; further, that Cynthia was probably poisoned by one of her own slaves, and that she asked to be buried on the road to Tivoli. So Cynthia says herself, when, immediately after her funeral, she appears to Propertius in a dream.

This, then, is the real epilogue of our story, and it carries it beyond the grave. The epilogue is spoken by the woman. It is a review of their life together, and a justification of herself. The spell of her beauty abode with him to the last. The awful change of death was there; but, he says, “she had the self-same hair and the self-same eyes as when they bore her forth.” These, then, the cruel fire had spared; these he could not forget. He knows it is Cynthia still. Is he merely artistic here? Or is it that even when Cupid’s cup of honey and gall has been drained to the last drop, he cannot bear the thought of such beauty in corruption?

But this is not all. The sordid realism of the Subura, so strangely commingled with the realm beyond the grave; the dying scene; the slaves to be tried by fire; the fleeting glimpse of the wild, irregular life of the poet; the emergence of those superstitions of the Roman underworld from which Propertius himself was never quite free;—the awful idea, for instance, that the gates of Hell stand open all night and that the monstrous shape of Cerberus himself—the great vampire, the infernal werewolf—and in his wake all the questing spirits of the dead, prowl through

the darkness at will until cockcrow ; the gruesome lines that bear witness to the undying fire of Cynthia's passion for her lover, even in the land of dust and shadow — these and other motives unite under the spell of the poet's bizarre and powerful imagination to make this piece unique :—

Beyond the grave lies something, not all of us expires ;  
There is a ghastly phantom that 'scapes the funeral fires.  
For lo, I dreamed that Cynthia, then resting with the dead  
Beside the noisy roadway, was bending o'er my bed.  
'Twas when my sleep seemed filled with the funeral of my dear,  
My heart seemed very heavy, my couch was cold and drear.  
She had the self-same tresses, her eyes were still the same,  
As when the bearers raised her : but on her side the flame  
Had gnawed away the vestment, nor had it paused to spare  
Her beryl ring — 'twas melted, the ring she used to wear.  
Her features, too, had flattened — the Stream that flows for aye,  
The River of Oblivion, was fretting them away.  
The thoughts, the living passion, were Cynthia's very own ;  
Her breathing self was echoed in every word and tone.  
She smote her hands : the gesture was Cynthia yet, when stirred.  
Poor hands, so dead and brittle — only the thumbs were heard :  
"You traitor ! who shall trust you ? you have no power to keep  
Your faith with any woman. So soon, and you can sleep ?  
So soon have you forgotten how many nights we met,  
The while Subura waketh ? So soon could you forget  
The rope, my dizzy casement, and how you stood below,  
Until you felt my kisses, those nights so long ago !  
And how we paused at corners, and loitered in the street ?  
We loved each other dearly — and stolen love is sweet !  
But all those secret vows, as we tarried side by side,  
Only the wild winds heard them — and flung them far and wide !  
When all grew dark before me, none called to me, ' Oh stay !  
Come back ! ' If you had called me, I should have gained one day.  
No watcher shook a rattle where I was lying dead :  
The tiles were old and broken, the rain beat on my head.  
And last of all, who saw you grief-stricken by my bier ?  
Who saw you clad in mourning ? Who saw you shed one tear ?  
And though beyond the city it irked you to proceed,  
You might have told my bearers from thence to use less speed.  
You never cast on perfumes, nor prayed the winds to fan  
My fires : no flowers you offered, Oh faithless, thankless man !  
Mere hyacinths, costing nothing — not even those you gave,  
Not even an humble potsherd to mark my lonely grave !  
" Burn Lygdamus ! The slave ! Heat the metal plates white hot !  
My wine hid death ; I drank it, and sensed too late the plot.  
Seize Nomas' charm of spittle ; she 'scaped the former time :  
Now, when the live coals wrap them, her hands will tell their crime !

“That cheap, bedizened street-wench, whom any man in Rome  
 Might mate with for a trifle, is mistress of our home ;  
 And, quite the high-born lady, in skirts that sweep the ground,  
 All over gold-embroidered, if any slave be found  
 Who dares to laud my beauty, will pounce upon her prey,  
 And make her rue her boldness with doubled tasks that day.  
 My Petale laid roses upon my monument :  
 A block and chain rewarded the faithful innocent !  
 Some slight request ‘for my sake’ poor Lalage once urged :  
 The girl was stripped, for my sake, hung by the hair, and scourged !  
 That vampire melts my likeness—you never once complain :  
 That she might get a dowry, you let me die—again.

“And yet I’ll not upbraid you, despite my bitter wrongs :  
 My reign was long, Propertius, as mistress of your songs.  
 And by the three weird sisters—so may he greet me fair,  
 That triple Dog of Hades—I kept my faith, I swear !  
 If not, let crawling vipers consort where I lie dead ;  
 My tomb shall hear their hissing, my bones shall be their bed.  
 For on that loathly Stream, two abodes diverse are placed :  
 Some to the one are sailing, some to the other haste.  
 In one barge Clytaemestra, with her the Cretan dame,  
 And eke the wooden portent wherein she hid her shame,  
 But lo, a crownèd pinnacle—its happy burden sees  
 Elysian roses yielding their fragrance to the breeze.  
 There lutes, and Phrygian cymbals, and Lydian lyres resound,  
 And turbaned dancers foot it in one delightful round.  
 We see fair Hypermestra, Andromeda too, those wives  
 Of stainless faith : they tell us the story of their lives.  
 One swears to us the arms which her mother’s gyves abused  
 Were guiltless as the fingers the cold, hard rocks had bruised.  
 And then the other tells us how she could not commit  
 The crime her sisters compassed—she had no heart for it.  
 So with the tears of death all the loves of life are healed :  
 But half of your offences I never have revealed.

“And now a charge I give you, if I can touch you yet,  
 If, spite of Doris’ philtres, you cannot quite forget :—  
 Don’t let my nurse go hungry, when she is weak and old.  
 Although she might have done it, she never sought your gold.  
 And my belovèd Latris, I would not have her stand  
 Before a second mistress, my mirror in her hand.  
 And all the verse you wrote me in other, happier days,  
 Belongs to me—go burn it, and cease to keep my praise !  
 And guard my grave from ivy : the tendrils grow amain,  
 And wind around my bones in an ever-tightening chain.  
 And where ’gainst shady hillsides the Anio rests his streams,  
 And in Alcides’ temple that wondrous ivory gleams,  
 There carve upon a column a poem, such as I  
 Deserved, but short, that passers may read it as they fly :  
 ‘Here lieth Golden Cynthia in Tibur’s fair demesne :

This added fame, Oh Anio, thy famous banks have seen.'

"Think not those dreams are false that Elysium sends to you :  
When good dreams come, as I have, you may believe them true,  
By night, the ghosts flit earthward, the sullen Gates of Doom  
Swing wide, and even Cerberus goes prowling through the gloom.  
At cockcrow, all the vagrants troop back to Acheron ;  
The Boatman keeps strict tally, and notes us one by one.  
For now, let others have thee ; ere long shalt be all mine :  
We two shall lie together, my bones shall cling to thine."  
She spoke : and in that instant, ere yet I was aware,  
The shape my arms were clasping had vanished in thin air.

Here the curtain falls on the drama of Propertius and Cynthia. It was by turns an idyl, a Romantic comedy, a problem play, a comic opera, a tragedy ; and finally, a mystery. It is fitting that the epilogue should be given to Cynthia. For, after all, Cynthia is the real lover of the two. Erring, passionate, undisciplined, wilful, wayward, sinned against and sinning—in spite of everything, she had never ceased to love him. And from first to last her love had been deeper and more genuine than his. This is what he means by making her swear so solemnly that she has always been faithful, but that he has not. As he looks back over the story of their life together, he realizes, and, with his essential generosity acknowledges, that after all he was more to blame than was she for the wreck of their happiness.

Yet the lovers were only too much alike, both in their strength and in their weakness, and they owed their joy and their sorrow to the one as much as to the other. His intellectual and moral ideals were high ; his impulses were kindly, generous, even chivalrous. But he had one fatal fault. His will was weak. He could not withstand the call of mere indulgence. Cynthia, too, was passionate and intellectual, and, in spite of her faults, was essentially generous and able to idealize. But she had a high temper and acted on impulse, not reflection. With his better part—and in those earlier days only his better part was known to her, or even to himself—he had dreamed of making her a friend, a companion, and an equal ; something no seasoned man of the world would have thought of. The appeal was made to Cynthia's better part, and she responded instantly to the demand as best she could ; and loved him to her dying day because he had once made it. But he could not set her the

example in his own life, and she could not rise superior to her disappointment.

Moreover, their position towards the world was an essentially false and unstable basis for the realization of his generous but chimerical ideal. They were both bound hand and foot—as we all are—by the conditions in which they lived. Three hundred years later, like Thais, like Pelagia, she might have become, as Plessis says, “a Christian or a saint.” But Cynthia belonged to the Augustan Age, and Propertius had only wanted to make her an honest woman. Alas, that was impossible.

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